

(10) The current tax code provides little recognition of the fact that our educators spend significant money out of their own pocket to better the education of our children.

(11) President Bush has recognized the importance of providing teachers with additional tax relief, in recognition of the many financial sacrifices our teachers make.

(b) SENSE OF THE SENATE.—It is the sense of the Senate that Congress and the President should—

(1) should pass legislation providing elementary and secondary level educators with additional tax relief in recognition of the many out of pocket, unreimbursed expenses educators incur to improve the education of our Nation's students.

Mr. WARNER. I ask for the yeas and nays

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is not a sufficient second at the moment.

Mr. WARNER. At the moment.

Perhaps I could engage the attention of my two colleagues. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be. There is a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired. Under the previous order, the hour of 12:30 having arrived, the Senate stands in recess until the hour of 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:38 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. INHOFE).

BETTER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ACT—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, what is the pending business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The pending business is the Warner amendment.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is my understanding that I would be recognized to lay down an amendment at 2:15, and I am here to do that.

I ask unanimous consent that the pending amendment be temporarily set aside.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 384 TO AMENDMENT NO. 358

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. MCCONNELL] proposes an amendment numbered 384 to amendment No. 358.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Amendments Submitted.")

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to offer an amendment to the BEST Act which incorporates the provisions of legislation I introduced earlier this year, the Paul D. Coverdell Teacher Protection Act. This important legislation extends protections from frivolous lawsuits to teachers, principals, administrators, and other education professionals who take reasonable steps to maintain order in the classroom.

The Teacher Liability Protection Act builds upon the good work Congress began in 1997 when it enacted the Volunteer Protection Act. As Senators may recall, the Volunteer Protection Act provides liability protections to individuals serving their communities as volunteers. After bringing several volunteer protection amendments to the floor through the 1990's and introducing the Volunteer Protection Act during the 104th Congress, I was blessed when Senator Paul Coverdell joined me in helping to steer this measure through the 105th Congress and have it enacted in 1997. Now, we need to extend similar liability protections to our nation's teachers, principals, and education professionals who are responsible for ensuring the safety of our children at school.

Everyone agrees that providing a safe, orderly environment is a critical component of ensuring that every child can reach their full academic potential. Teachers who are unable to maintain order in the classroom cannot reasonably be expected to share their knowledge with their pupils, whether it be in math, science, or literature. Disruptive, rowdy, and sometimes violent students not only threaten the immediate safety of their classmates, they threaten the very future of our children by denying them the opportunity to learn. Unfortunately, teachers, principals, and other education officials share an impediment in their efforts to ensure that students can learn in a safe, orderly learning environment: the fear of lawsuits. All too often, these hard-working professionals find their reasonable actions to instill discipline and maintain order are questioned and second guessed by opportunistic trial lawyers.

Today's teachers will tell you that the threat of litigation is in the back of their minds and forces them at times to act in a manner which might not be in the best interests of their students. A 1999 survey of secondary school principals found that 25 percent of the respondents were involved in lawsuits or out-of-court settlements in the previous two years—an amazing 270 percent increase from only 10 years earlier. The same survey found that 20

percent of principals spent 5 to 10 hours a week in meetings or documenting events in an effort to avoid litigation. This is time that our educators should spend counseling students, developing curriculum, and maintaining order—not fending off frivolous lawsuits.

Mr. President, allow me to illustrate my point with several examples.

In May of 1998, representatives of the Bethlehem Area School District learned that one of their students, Justin Swidler, had created a web site where he solicited money to hire a hit man to kill his math teacher, Mrs. Kathleen Fulmer. According to a local newspaper account, the web site contained images of the principal being shot and "a picture of Fulmer which changed, or 'morphed' into a portrait of Adolf Hitler." The site, which bears a name I cannot repeat on the Senate floor, also listed reasons "Why Fulmer Should Be Fired" and then reasons "Why She Should Die." I think that deserves repeating: The list was not limited to the typical juvenile carping about a teacher. It listed why she should die.

The school district, much to its credit, expelled Justin Swidler. However, rather than encouraging young Justin to take responsibility for his actions, the response of Justin's parents was all too predictable—they hired a lawyer and they sued. First, they sued the school district. Then, they sued the principal. After that, they sued the superintendent. Finally, in the coup de grace of the litigation, the Swidlers sued the teacher whom their son had threatened to kill. I repeat, the parents sued the teacher whom their son had threatened to kill.

What reasons did the Swidlers give for their suit? They claimed, among other things, to have suffered "embarrassment, ridicule, humiliation, isolation and severe emotional distress" as well as financial loss and "inconvenience." The Swidlers wanted the school to pay because they suffered "embarrassment" and "inconvenience" because their son threatened the life of his math teacher? That is utterly outrageous. The boy's father, Howard Swidler, also claimed his son had difficulty enrolling in a new school because "teachers wouldn't provide recommendations." I can imagine that. The teachers at Nitchmann Middle School didn't want to write a letter of recommendation for this kid who had compared a fellow teacher to Hitler and threatened to have her killed. What nerve of those teachers not to write a recommendation under those circumstances.

These lawsuits and countersuits dragged out in the courts for more than 2½ years. During this time, good reputations were besmirched, distinguished careers were ruined, and each party accumulated what we can only estimate to be thousands of dollars in legal bills.